Here begynneth a lytell treatyse named the bowge of courte. by John Skelton.

The Bowge

IN Antumpne whan the sonne in vyrgyne
By radyante hete enryped hath our corne
Whan luna full of mutabylyte
As Emperes the dyademe hath worne
Of our pole artyke smylynge halfe in scorne
At our foly and our vnstedfastnes
The tyme whan Mars to werre hym dyde dres

I callynge to mynde the grete auctoryte
Of poetes olde whiche full craftely
Under as couerte termes as coude be
Can touche a trout hand cloke it subtylly
With fresshe vtteraunce full sentencyously
Dyuerse in style some spared not vyce to wryte
Some of moralyte nobly dyde endyte

Wherby I rede theyr renome and theyr fame
Maye neuer dye but euermore endure
I was sore moued to a force the same
But Ignoraunce full soone dyde me dysture
And shewed that in this arte was not sure
For to Illumyne she sayd I was to dulle
Auysynge me my penne away to pulle

And not to wryte/for he that so wyll atteyne
Excedynge ferther than his connynge is
His hede may be harde but feble is his brayne
Yet haue I knowen suche er this
But of reproche surely he may not mys
That clymmeth hyer than he may fotynge haue
What and he slyde downe who shall hym saue

Thus vp & downe my mynde was drawen & cast
That I ne wyste what to do was best

10—14

Soo sore enwerped that I was at the laste
Enforced to slepe and for to take some reste
And to lye downe as sone as I me dreste
At harwyche porte slumbrynge as I laye
In myn hostes house called powers keye

Me thoughte I sawe a shyppe goodly of sayle
Come saylynge forth in to that hauen brood
Her takelynge ryche and of hye apparayle
She keste an anker and there she laye at rode
Marchauntes her borded to se what she had lode
There in they founde royall marchaundyse
Fraghted with pleasure of what ye coude deuyse

But than I thought I wolde not dwell behynde
Amonge all other I put myselfe in prece
Than there couds I none aquentaunce fynde
There was moche noyse anone one cryed cese
Sharpely cōmaundynge eche man holde his pece
Maysters he sayde the shyp that ye here se
Tho bowge of courte it hyght for certayne

The owner therof is lady of estate
Whoos name to tell is dame saunce pere
Her marchaundyse is ryche and fortunate
But who wyll haue it must paye therfore dere
This royall chaffre that is shypped here
Is called fauoure to stonde in her good grace
Than sholde ye se there prellynge in a pace

Of one and other that wolde this lady see
Whiche sat behynde a traues of sylke fyne
Of golde of tellew the fynest that myghte be
In a trone whiche her clerer dyde shyne

Than Phebus in his ſpere celeſtyne
Whoos beaute honoure goodly porte
I haue to lytyll connynge to reporte

But of eche thynge there as I toke hede
Amonge all other was wrytten in her trone
In golde letters this worde whiche I dyde rede
Garder le fortune que eſt mauelz & bone
And as I ſtode redynge this verſe my ſelfe alone
Her chyef gentyl woman daunger by her name
Gaue me ataunte and ſayd I was to blame

To be ſo perte to preſe ſo proudly bppe
She ſayd ſhe trowed that I eten ſauſe
She aſked yf euer I dranke of ſaucys cuppe
And I than ſoftly anſwered to that clauſe
That ſo to ſaye. I had gyuen her no cauſe
Than aſked ſhe me Syr ſo god the ſpede
What is thy name and I ſayd it was drede

What moued the quod ſhe hydder to come
Forſoth quod I to bye ſome of your ware
And with that worde on me ſhe gaue a glome
With browes bente and gan on me to ſtare
Full daynnouſly and fro me ſhe dyd fare
Leuynge me ſtandynge as a maſed man
To whome there came an other gentyll woman

Delyre her name was & ſo ſhe me tolde
Sayenge to me broder be of good chere
Abaſſhe you not but hardely be bolde
Auaunce your ſelfe to aproche and come nere
What though our chaffer be neuer ſo dere
Yet I auyſe you to ſpeke for ony drede

Who ſpareth to ſpeke in fayth he ſpareth to ſpede

Mayſtres quod J. J haue none acquentaunce
That wyll for me be medyatoure and mene
And this an other J haue but ſmall ſubſtaunce
Peace quod deſyre ye ſpeke not worth a bene
If ye haue not in fayth J wyll you lene
A precyous Jewell no rycher in this londe
Bone auenture haue here now in your honde

Shyfte now therewith let ſe as ye can
In bowge of courte cheuyſaunce to make
For J dare ſaye that there nys erthly man
But and he can bone auenture take
There can no fauour ne frenſhyp hym forſake
Bone auenture may bryngе you in ſuche caſe
That ye ſhall ſtande in fauour and in grace

But of one thynge J werne you or J goo
She that ſtyreth the ſhyp make her your frende
Mayſtres quod J. J praye you tell me why ſoo
And how J maye that waye & meanes fynde
Forſothe quod ſhe how euer blowe the wynde
Fortune gydeth and ruleth all oure ſhyppe
Whome ſhe hateth ſhall ouer the ſee boorde ſkyppe

Whome ſhe loueth of all pleaſure is ryche
Whyles ſhe laugheth and hath luſt for to playe
Whome ſhe hateth ſhe caſteth in the dyche
For whan ſhe frowneth ſhe thynketh to make a fray
She cheryſſhed hym and hym ſhe caſteth awaye
Alas quod J how myght J haue her ſure
In fayth quod ſhe by bone auenture

Thus in a rowe of marchauntes a grete route

Sued to fortune that she wolde be theyr frende
They thronge in fast and flocked her aboute
And I with them prayed her to haue in mynde
She promysed to vs all she wolde be kynde
Of bowge of court she asketh what he wold haue
And we asked fauour/and fauour she vs gaue

¶ Thus endeth the prologue. And begynneth the Bowge of courte breuely compyled.

¶ Drede.

The sayle is vp fortune ruleth our helme
We wante no wynde to passe now ouer all
Fauour we haue tougher than ouy elme
That wyll abyde and neuer from vs fall
But vnder hony ofte tyme lyeth bytter gall
For as me thought in our shyppe I dyde se
Full subtyll persones in nombre foure and thre

The fyrst was fauell full of flatery
With fables false that well coude fayne a tale
The seconde was Suspect whiche that dayly
Mysdempte eche man with face deedly and pale
And Heruy haster that well coude pycke a male
With other foure of theyr affynyte
Dysdayne. Ryotte. Dyssymuler. Subtylte

Fortune theyr frende wͭ whome oft she dyd dauͤce
They coude not fayle they tought they were so sure
And oftentymes I wolde my selfe auaunce
With them to make solace and pleasure
But my dysporte they coude not well endure
They sayd they hated for to dele with Drede
Than fauell gan with fayre speche me to fede

Noo thynge erthly that I wonder so sore
As of your connynge that is so excellent
Deynte to haue with vs suche one in store
So vertuously that hath his dayes spente
Fortune to you gyftes of grace hath lente
Lo what is a man to haue connynge
All erthly treloure it is surmontynge

Ye be an apte man as ony can be founde
To dwell with vs & serue my ladyes grace
Ye be to her ye a worth a thousande pounde
I herde her speke of you within a shorte space
Whan there were dyuerse by sore you dyde manace
And though I say it I was my selfe your frende
For here be dyuerse to you that be vnkynde

But this one thynge ye may be sure of me
For by that lorde that bought dere all mankynde
I can not flater I must be playne to the
And ye nede ought man shewe to me your mynde
For ye haue me whome faythfull ye shall fynde
Whyles I haue ought by god thou shalt not lacke
And yf nede be a bolde worde I dare cracke

Nay naye be sure whyles I am on your syde
Ye may not fall truste me ye may not fayle
Ye stonde in fauour and fortune is your gyde
And as she wyll so shall our grete shyppe sayle
These lewde cocke watis shall neuermore preuayle
Ayenst you hardely therfore be not afrayde
Fare well tyll soone but no worde that I sayde

¶ Dede.

Than thanked I hym for his grete gentylnes
But as me thought he ware on hym a cloke
That lyued was with doubtfull doublenes
Me thought of wordes that he had full a poke
His stomak stuffed ofte tymes dyd reboke
Suspycyon me thought mette hym at a brayde
And I drewe nere to herke what they two sayde

In fayth quod suspecte) spake drede no worde of me
Why what than wylt thou let men to speke
He sayth he can not well accorde with the
Whilht quod suspecte) goo playe hym I ne reke
By cryste quod fauell drede is a soleyne freke
What lete vs holde hym vp man for a whyle
Ye so quod suspecte) he may vs bothe begyle

And whan he came walkynge soberly
With whom/and ha/and with a croked loke
Me thought his hede was full of gelously
His eyen rollynge his handes faste they quoke
And to me warde the strayte waye he toke
God spede broder to me quod he than
And thus to talke with me he began

Suspycyon.

Ye remembre the gentylman ryght nowe
That cõmened wt you me thought a party space
Beware of hym for I make god auowe
He wyll begyle you and speke fayre to your face
Ye neuer dwelte in suche an other place
For here is none that dare well other truste
But I wolde tell you a thynge and yf I durste

Spake he a fayth no worde to you of me

I wote and he dyde ye wolde me telle
I haue a fauoure to you wherof it be
That I muste shewe you moche of my counsell
But I wonder what the deuyll of helle
He sayde of me whan he with you dyde talke
By myn auyse ble not with hym to walke

The soueraynst thynge that ony man may haue
Is lytyll to say/and moche to here and se
For but I trusted you so god me saue
I wolde noo thynge so playne be
To you onely me thynke I durste shryue me
For now am I plenarely dysposed
To shewe you thynges that may not be dysclosed

Brede.

Than I allured hym my fydelyte
His counseyll secrete neuer to dysture
If he coude fynde in herte to truste me
Elles I prayed hym with all my besy cure
To kepe it hymselfe for than he myght be sure
That noo man erthly coude hym bewreye
Whyles of his mynde it were lockte with the keye

By god quod he this and thus it is
And of his mynde he shewed me all and some
Fare well quod he we wyll talke more of this
So he departed there he wolde be come
I dare not speke I promysed to be dome
But as I stode musynge in my mynde
Heruy hastet came leppynge lyght as lynde

Upon his breste he bare a berlynge bore
His throte was clere and lustely coude sayne

My thoughte his gowne was all furred with fore
And euer he lange/lythe I am no thynge playne
To kepe hym frome pykynge it was a grete payne
He galed on me with his gotylhe berde
Whan I loked on hym my purse was halfe aferde

Heruy haster.

Syr god you saue why loke ye so sadde
What thynge is that I maye do for you
I wonder thynge that ye waxe not madde
For and I studye sholde as ye do nowe
My wytte wolde waste I make god auowe
Tell me your mynde me thynke ye make a verse
I coude it stan and ye wolde it reherse

But to the poynte shortely to procede
Where hathe your dwellynge ben or ye cam here
For as I trowe I haue sene you in dede
Or this whan that ye made me royall chere
Holde vp the helme loke vp and lete god stere
I wolde be mery what wynde that euer blowe
Heue & how rombelow row ỹ bote norman rowe

Prynces of yougthe can ye synge by rote
Or shall I sayle with you a felaushyp assaye
For on the booke I can not synge a note
Wolde to god it wolde please you some daye
A balade boke before me for to laye
And lerne me to synge (Be my fa sol)
And whan I sayle bobbe me on the noll

Loo what is to you a pleasure grete
To haue that connynge and wayes that ye haue
By goddes soule I wonder how ye gete

So grete pleasure or who to you it gaue
Syr pardone me I am an homely knaue
To be with you thus perte and thus bolde
But ye be welcome to our housholde

And I dare say there is no man here inne
But wolde be glad of your company
I wyst neuer man that so soone coude wynne
The fauour that ye haue with my lady
I praye to god that it may neuer dy
It is your fortune for to haue that grace
As I be saued it is a wonder case

For as for me I serued here many a daye
And yet vnneth I can haue my lyuynge
But I requyre you no worde that I saye
For and I knowe ony erthly thynge
That is agayne you ye shall haue wetynge
And ye be welcome syr so god me saue
I hope here after a frende of you to haue

¶ Drede.

With that as he departed so fro me
Anone ther mete with hym as me thought
A man/but wonderly besene was he
He loked hawte he sette eche man at nought
His gawdy garment w̄ storunys was all wrought
With indygnacyon lyned was his hode
He frowned as he wolde swere by cockes blode

He bote his lyppe he loked passynge coye
His face was belymmed as byes had hym stounge
It was no tyme with hym to Jape nor toye
Enuye hathe wasted his lyuer and his lounge

Hatred by the herte so had hym wronge
That he loked pale as asshes to my syghte
Dyldayne I wene his cowerous carbes hyghte

To heruy hasker than he spake of me
And I drewe nere to harke what they two sayde
Now quod Dyldayne as I shall saued be
I haue grete scorne & am tyght euyll apayed
Than quod Heruy why arte thou so dysmayde
By cryste quod he for it is shame to saye
To se Johan dawes that came but yester daye

How he is now taken in conceyte
This doctour dawcocke Drede I wene he hyghte
By goddes bones but yf we haue som sleyte
It is lyke he wyll stonde in our syghte
By god quod Heruy & it so happen myghte
Lete vs therfore shortely at a worde
Fynde some mene to caste hym ouer the borde

By hym that me boughte than quod Dyldayne
I wonder sore he is in suche conceyte
Turde quod hasker I wyll the no thynge layne
There muste for hym be layde some prety beyte
We tweyne I trowe be not without dysceyte
Fyrste pycke a querell & fall oute with hym then
And so outface hym with a carde of ten

Forth with he made on me a prowde assawte
With scornfull loke meuyd all in mode
He wente aboute to take me in a fawte
He frounde he stared he stamped where he stoode
I loked on hym I wende he had be woode
He set the arme proudly vnder the syde

And in this wyse he gan with me to chyde

Wyldayne.

Remembrest thou what thou sayd yester nyght
Wylt thou abyde by the wordes agayne
By god I haue of the now grete dyspyte
I shall the angre ones in euery payne
It is grete scorne to se suche an hayne
As thou art one that came but yesterdaye
With vs olde seruauntes suche maysters to playe

I tell the I am of contenaunce
What weneste I were. I trowe thou knowe not me
By goddes woundes but for dysplesaunce
Of my quarell soone wolde I venged be
But no force I shall ones mete with the
Come whan it wyll oppose the I shall
What soneuer auenture therof fall

Trowest thou dreuyll I say thou gawdy knaue
That I haue deynte to se the cherysshed thus
By goddys syde my sworde thy berde shall shaue
Well ones thou shalt be chermed I wus
Haye strawe for tales thou shalt not rule vs
We be thy betters and so thou shalt vs take
Or we shall the oute of thy clothes shake

Drede.

With that came Ryotte rushynge all at ones
A rusty gallande to ragged and to rente
And on the borde he whyrled a payr of bones
Quater treye dews he clatered as he wente
Now haue at all by saynt Thomas of kente
And euer he threwe and kest I wote nere what

His here was growen thorowe oute his hat

Than I beheldehow he dysgysed was
His hede was heuy for watchynge ouer nyght
His eyen blereed his face shone lyke a glas
His gowne so shorte that it ne couer myght
His rumpe he wente so all for somer lyght
His hose was garded with a lyste of grene
Yet at the knee they were broken I wene

His cote was checked with patches rede & blewe
Of kyrkeby kendall was his shorte demye
And ay he sange in fayth decon thou crewe
His elbowe bare he ware his gere so nye
His nose a droppynge his lyppes were full drye
And by his syde his wynarde and his pouche
The deuyll myght daunce therin for ony crowche

Counter he coude (O lux) vpon a potte
An eestryche fedder of a cappons tayle
He set vp fretlhely vpon his hat a lofte
What reuell route quod he and gan to rayle
How ofte he had hit Jenet on the tayle
Of kelyce ketewse and lytell prety cate
How ofte he knocked at her klycked gate

What sholde I tell more of this rebaudrye
I was alhamed so to here hym prate
He had no pleasure but in harlotrye
Ay quod he in the deuylles date
What arte thou I sawe the now but late
Forsothe quod I in this courte I dwell nowe
Welcome quod Ryote I make god auowe

Ryote.

And syr in fayth why comest not vs amonge
To make the mery as other felowes done
Thou muste were and stare man aldaye longe
And wake all nyght and slepe tyll it be none
Thou mayst not studye or muse on the mone
This worlde is no thynge but ete drynke an slepe
And thus with vs good company to kepe

Plucke vp thyn herte vpon a mery pyne
And lete vs laugh a placke or tweyne at nale
What the deuyll man myrthe was neuer one
What loo man se here of dyce a bale
A bydelynge caste for that is in thy male
Now haue at all that lyeth vpon the burde
Fye on this dyce they be not worth a turde

Haue at the hasarde or at the dosen browne
Or els pas a peny to a pounde
Now wolde to god thou wolde leye money downe
Lorde how that I wolde caste it full rounde
Ay in my pouche a buckell I haue founde
The armes of calyce I haue no coyne nor crosse
I am not happy I renne ay on the losse

Now renne muste I to the stewys syde
To wete yf malkyn my lemman haue gete oughte
I lete her to hyre that men maye on her ryde
Her harnes ealy ferre and nere is soughte
By goddes sydes syns I her thyder broughte
She hath gote me more money with her tayle
Than hath some shyppe that into bordews sayle

Had I as good an hors as she is a mayre
I durste auenture to Journey thorugh fraunce

Who rydeth on hér he nedeth not to care
For she is trusted for to breke a launce
It is a curtet that well can wynche & praunce
To her wyll I now all my pouerte lege
And tyll I come haue here is myn hat to plege

Prede.

Gone is this knaue this rybaude foule & lewde
He ran as fast as euer that he myghte
Unthryftnes in hym may well be shewed
For whome tyborne groneth both daye and nyghte
And as I stode and keste alyde my syghte
Dyssdayne I sawe with Dyssymulacyon
Standynge in sadde communycacyon

But there was poyntynge & noddynge with ȳ hede
And many wordes sayde in secrete wyse
They wandred ay and stode styll in no stede
Me thought alwaye Dyssymular dyde deuyse
Me pallynge lore myn herte than gan aryse
I dempte & dredde theyr talkynge was not good
Anon Dyssymular came where I stode

Than in his hode I sawe there faces tweyne
That one was lene & lyke a pyned ghoost
That other loked as he wolde haue me slayne
And to mewarde as he gan for to coost
Whan that he was euen at me almoost
I sawe a knyfe hyd in his one sleue
Wheron was wryten this worde myscheue

And in his other sleue me thought I sawe
A spone of golde full of hony swete
To fede a fole and for to preue a dawe

And on that sleue these wordes were wrete
A fals abstracte cometh from a fals concrete
His hode was syde his cope was rolet graye
These were the wordes he to me dyde saye

Dyllymulacyon.

How do ye mayster ye loke so soberly
As I beseued at the dredefull daye
It is a perylous vyce this enuy
Alas a connynge man ne dwelle maye
In no place well but foles with hym fraye
But as for that connynge hath no foo
Saue hym that nought can scrypture sayth soo

I knowe your vertu and your lytterature
By that lytell connynge that I haue
Ye be malygned sore I you ensure
But ye haue crafte your selfe alwaye to saue
It is grete scorne to se a mysproude knaue
With a clerke that connynge is to prate
Lote them go lowse them in the deuylles date

For all be it that this longe not to me
Yet on my backe I bere suche lewde delynge
Ryght now I spake with one I trowe I se
But what a strawe I maye not tell all thynge
By god I saye there is grete herte brennynge
Betwene the persone ye wote of you
Alas I coude not dele so with a yew

I wolde eche man were so playn as I
It is a worlde I saye to here of some
I hate this faynynge frye vpon it frye
A man can not wete where to become

I wys I coud not tell but humlery home
I dare not speke we be so layde awayte
For all our courte is full of dysceyte

Now by sayntt fraunceys that holy man and frere
I hate these wayes agayne you that they take
Were I as you I wolde ryde them full nere
And by my trouth but yf an ende they make
Yet wyll I saye some wordes for your sake
That shall them angre I holde there on a grote
For some shall wene be hanged by the throte

I haue a stuppynge oyster in my poke
Trust me and yf it come to a nede
But I am lothe for to reyse a smoke
yf ye coude be otherwyse agrede
And so I wolde it were so god me spede
For this maye brede to a confusyon
Without god make a good conclusyon

Naye se where yonder stondeth the tedet man
A flaterynge knaue & falle he is god wote
The dreuyll stondeth to herken and he can
It were more thryft he bought hym a newe cote
It wyll not be/his purse is not on flote
All that he wereth it is borowed ware
His wytte is thynne his hode is threde bare

More coude I saye but what this is ynowe
A dewe tyll soone we shall speke more of this
Ye must be ruled as I shall tell you howe
Amendys may be of that is now a mys
And I am your syr so haue I blys
In euery poynte that I can do or saye

Gyue me your honde fare well and haue good daye

Dzede.

Sodaynly as he departed me fro
Came prestynge in one in a wonder araye
Or I was ware behynde me he layd bo
Than I astonyed of that sodeyne fraye
Sterte all at ones I lyked no thynge his playe
For yf I had not quyckely stedde the touche
He had plucte oute the nobles of my pouche

He was trussed in a garmente strayte
I haue not sene suche an others page
For he coude well vpon a casket wayte
His hode all pounsed and garded lyke a cage
Lyght lyme fynger he toke none other wage
Harken quod he loo here myn honde in thyne
To vs welcome thou art by sayntt Mayntyne

Dyscreyte

But by that lozde that is one two and thre
I haue an erraunde to rounde in your ere
He tolde me so by god ye maye truste me
Parte remembze whan ye were there
There I wynked on you/wote ye not where
In(A)loco I mene iuxta(B)
Woo is hym that is blynde and may not se

But to here the subtylyte and the crafte
As I shall tell you yf ye wyll harke agayne
And whan I sawe the hozsons wolde you hafte
To holde myne honde by god I had grete payne
For forthwyth there I had hym slayne
But that I dzede mozze wolde come oute

Who deleth with shrewes hath nede to loke aboute

¶ Drede.

And as he rounded thus in myn ere
Of false collusyon confetryd by assente
Me thought I se lewde felawes here and there
Came for to sle me of mortall entente
And as they came the shypborde taste I hente
And thought to lepe/and euen with that awoke
Caughte penne and ynke & wrote this lytyll boke

I wo[illegible]e therwith no man were myscontente
Besechynge you that shall it se or rede
In euery poynte to be indyfferente
Syth all in substañce of slumbrynge doth procede
I wyll not saye it is mater in dede
But yet oftyme suche dremes be founde trewe
Now constrewe ye what is the resyde we

¶ Thus endeth the Bowge of courte Enprynted at London By Wynkyn de worde in Flete strete/in the sygne of the sonne.